



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## RECOLLECTIONS OF "ORION" HORNE.

BY EDMUND GOSSE,

---

THE recent publication of the love letters which passed, in 1845 and 1846, between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, has blown a little of the dust off several names which were brightly before the public then and have become sadly obscured since. The two learned lovers speak of Mr. Serjeant Talfourd and of his incomparable tragedy of "Ion," of Sir John Hanmer and his sonnets, of the terrible criticisms of Chorley, of the writings of Abraham Heraud and Silk Buckingham and Cornelius Mathews. These are faded notorieties with a vengeance. But amongst these names, faintly echoing from the earliest Victorian period, we meet with one more than the rest deserving of perpetuation, with at all events a greater mass of actually accomplished work attached to it, the name of Mr. Horne, the author of "Cosmo de Medici," of "Gregory VII.," and, above all, of "the farthing epic," the once extremely celebrated "Orion." And with this there comes vividly back to me a vision of an extraordinary personage, of whom I saw a great deal in my youth, and of whom I feel disposed to garner some of my impressions before I lose them.

He had been baptized Richard Henry Horne, but in late middle life he had changed the second of these names to Hengist. It was in 1874 that I set eyes on him first, in circumstances which were somewhat remarkable. The occasion was the marriage of the poet, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, to the eldest daughter of Westland Marston, the playwright. There was a large and distinguished company present, and most of the prominent "Preraphaelites," as they were still occasionally called. In the midst of the subsequent festivities, and when the bride was surrounded by her friends, a tiny old gentleman cleared a space around him, and, all uninvited, began to sit upon the floor and sing, in a funny little cracked

voice, Spanish songs to his own accompaniment on the guitar. He was very unusual in appearance. Although he was quite bald at the top of his head, his milk-white hair was luxuriant at the sides, and hung in clusters of ringlets. His moustache was so long that it became whisker, and in that condition drooped, also in ringlets, below his chin. The elder guests were inclined to be impatient, the younger to ridicule this rather tactless interruption. Just as it seemed possible something awkward would happen, Robert Browning stepped up and said, in his loud, cheerful voice: "That was charming, Horne! It quite took us to 'the warm South' again," and cleverly leading the old gentleman's thoughts to a different topic, he put an end to the incident. ~

This scene was very characteristic of Horne, who was gay, tactless and vain to a remarkable degree. He had lately come back from Australia, where nothing had gone well with him for long together, and he did not understand the ways of the younger generation in London. But to those who could be patient with his peculiarities, he offered a very amusing study. He had delightful stories, many of which are still inedited, of the great men of his youth—Wordsworth, Hunt, Hazlitt, in particular. But he himself, with his incredible mixture of affectation and fierceness, humor and absurdity, enthusiasm and ignorance, with his incoherency of appearance, at once so effeminate and so muscular, was better than all his tales. He was a combination of the troubadour and the prize-fighter, on a miniature scale. It was impossible not to think of a curly white poodle when one looked at him, especially when he would throw his fat little person on a sofa and roll about, with gestures less dignified than were, perhaps, ever before seen in a poet of between seventy and eighty years. And yet he had a fine, buoyant spirit, and a generous imagination with it all. But the oddity of it, alas! is what lingers in the memory—those milky ringlets, the extraordinary turn of the head, the embrace of the beribboned guitar!

In a pathetic little letter which Horne wrote to me in his eightieth year, he said, quite placidly, that though he was now forgotten, no poet had ever had more pleasant things said of him by people dead and gone. It was perfectly true. Wordsworth and Tennyson, Leigh Hunt and Walter Savage Landor, had all praised his poetry; Carlyle had declared that "the fire of the stars was in him," and G. H. Lewes that he was "a man of the most unques-

tionable genius." How highly Robert and Elizabeth Browning regarded him may be seen, over and over again, in the course of their correspondence. But his talent was of a very fugitive kind. He was a very remarkable poet for seven or eight years, and a tiresome and uninspired scribbler for the rest of his life. His period of good work began in 1837, when he published "*Cosmo de Medici*" and "*The Death of Marlowe*;" it closed in 1843, with the publication of "*Orion*," and the composition of all that was best in the "*Ballad Romances*." If any one wished to do honor to the *manes* of poor old Horne—and in these days far less distinguished poets than he receive the honors of rediscovery—the way to do it would be to publish in one volume the very best of his writings, and nothing more. The badness of the bulk of his later verse is outside all calculation. How a man who had once written so well as he, could ever come to write, for instance, "*Bible Tragedies*" (1881), is beyond all skill of the literary historian to comprehend.

But, although Horne was, for a short time, a good poet, he was always more interesting as a human being. His whole life was an adventure; it was like a "book for boys." He was pleased to relate that even his birth was not ordinary, for he came into the world so exactly at the stroke of midnight on the last day of the year, that it could never be decided whether he was born in 1802 or 1803. I do not know who his parents were or what his family. In the days when I saw so much of him, he appeared to be quite solitary; he never spoke of possessing a relative. He was trained for the army, and lost his chance through some foolish escapade. But before this he had been at school at Enfield, where Tom Keats, the poet's brother, and Charles Wells, who wrote "*Joseph and His Brethren*," had been his school-fellows. He used to tell us in his old age that he was once scampering out of school, when he saw the chaise of Mr. Hammond, the surgeon, standing at the door. John Keats, who was Hammond's apprentice, was holding the horse, his head sunken forward in a brown study; the boys, who knew how pugnacious Keats was, dared Horne to throw a snowball at him, which Horne did, hitting Keats in the back of the head, and then escaping round the corner at a headlong pace. It used to be very thrilling, in the eighties, to hear the old gentleman tell how he had actually snowballed Keats; almost as though one should arise and say that he had sold Shakespeare a cheese-cake.

Just before he should have entered Sandhurst, the young Horne was lured away to America, and offered himself as a volunteer in the war of Mexican independence. He entered the new Mexican navy as a midshipman, and dashed about under irregular fire at the bombardment of Vera Cruz and at the siege of San Juan Ulloa. He used to tell us that he never would miss his swim in the sea in the morning, nor return to the ship until he had been well within range of the guns of Vera Cruz. The Spaniards could never hit him, he said; but one day when he was making a long nose at the gunners, he was as nearly as possible swallowed from behind by a shark. I forget how he accounted for his escape, but there was always a good deal of Baron Munchausen about Mr. Horne.

When the Mexican War was over, he strolled across the United States, with a belt full of doubloons girded about his person, and visited the Mohawks, the Oneidas and the Hurons. After many strange adventures, he must needs bathe in public under the cataract of Niagara. Two of his ribs were found to be broken when he was fished out again, insensible. He then took a steerage passage in a steamer that was wrecked in the St. Lawrence. He walked in moccasins over to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and started again in a timber ship, whose crew rose in mutiny, and set fire to her in mid-Atlantic; Mr. Horne quelled the mutiny and put out the fire, to the eternal gratitude of the captain, who fell upon his knees upon the deck and kissed his hands. I delighted in Mr. Horne's stories of his past life, but sometimes I used to fear that he exaggerated.

It was not until he was thirty years of age that Horne began to take up literature, and he was thirty-five when he enjoyed his first success with "*Cosmo de Medici*," an historical tragedy in blank verse, which has some very fine passages, and was greatly admired in the London coteries. Then came the period of seven years, of which I have spoken, in which Horne really took his place, with Browning and Tennyson, as one of the most promising young poets of the age. If he had died in 1844, he would probably hold a high place still, as an "inheritor of unfulfilled renown," but unfortunately he lived for forty more years, and never discovered that his talent had abandoned him. His "*Orion*," which was published in 1843, was brought out at the price of one farthing. Elizabeth Barrett sent out to the nearest book shop for

a shilling's worth, but was refused her four dozen copies. Purchasers had to produce their brass farthing for each "Orion," and no change was given. This was done "to mark the public contempt into which epic poetry has fallen," but it was also a very good advertisement. Everybody talked about Mr. Horne's "farthing" poem, and after some editions had run out, the price was cautiously raised. But when the tenth edition appeared, at a cost of seven shillings, the public perceived that its leg was being pulled, and it purchased "Orion" no more. In spite of all this, "Orion" is far, indeed, from being a humorous composition; it is an epical romance of Greek mythology, with some remote relation to the "Hyperion" of Keats, and contains some noble passages of poetry.

Space is not here at my command to say what varied employments Horne took up when the Muses began to abandon him. He was sub-editor of "Household Words" under Dickens, and special commissioner of the "Daily News" to Ireland when the great famine broke out. Suddenly, and desperately determined to marry, he went down to stay with Miss Mitford in Berkshire, and proposed to all the neighbouring heiresses one after another, to the intense indignation of that lady, who declared that he had used her hospitable dining-room to propose to a lady (with £50,000 a year) at lunch, and to another (with £40,000 a year) at tea. None of these efforts was crowned with success; perhaps, he had the presumption to be in love with Elizabeth Barrett, whom he had at that time never seen, although oceans of correspondence had passed between them. At all events, directly Robert Browning had carried off his eminent bride, Horne appeared with a little Miss Foggs upon his arm, whom he presently married. They did not get on together; why should history conceal the fact, when Horne himself was wont to dilate upon it so freely to his friends? Mrs. Horne, in tears, threw herself upon the paternal sympathy of Charles Dickens, and Horne sought a southern hemisphere.

In Australia he was commander of the Gold Escort, and it was delightful, years afterward, to hear him tell how he convoyed several tons of bullion from Ballarat to Melbourne amid every species of peril. Then he became Gold Commissioner to the Government, but here his flow of high spirits carried him away. He then flung himself into the cultivation of the cochineal insect, edited a Victorian newspaper, became Commissioner of Waterworks, gave

lessons in gymnastics, professed the art of natation, and was one of the starters of Australian wine-growing. Long afterwards, when the first Australian cricketers came over to England, Horne wrote to me: "I learn that the cricketers have made *each* £1,000 over here! Why, oh! why did not I become an Australian cricketer, instead of an unprofitable swimmer? When years no longer smiled upon my balls and runs, I might have retired upon my laurelled bat, and have published tragedies at my own expense. Is there any redress for these things in another world? I don't think so; I shall be told I had my choice." He certainly paid his money. No one, I suppose, ever failed in so many brilliant, unusual enterprises, every one of which was sure to succeed when he adopted it.

When he came back from Australia, I think about 1869, he was in very low water. He had managed very deeply to offend Charles Dickens, who had taken up the cause of Horne's neglected wife. What happened to Horne in the early years after his return, I never heard; I fancy that he went abroad for some part of the time. A little later, Robert Browning, who had always felt a sincere regard for Horne, was able to be of practical service to him. He was encouraged to republish his poems, and to appeal by means of them to the new age. In these days, one used to meet him at afternoon parties, carrying with great care, under his arm, the precious guitar, which he called "my daughter," and was used ceremoniously to introduce as "Miss Horne." A little later Horne would be discovered on a low stool, warbling Mexican romances, or murmuring with exaggerated gallantry to the prettiest girl in the room. At this time he was thirsting for publicity—if he could only be engaged to sing in public, to box in public, to swim in public, how happy he would be! It used to be said that when he was nearly seventy, Horne persuaded the captain of a ship to tie his legs together and fling him into the sea, and that he swam with ease to the boat. A wonderful little ringletted athlete, no doubt!

A great deal of Horne's work in verse, and even in prose, remains unpublished, and is not very likely, I should think, to be ever printed. As I have said, his faculty, which had been so graceful, faded away from him about forty years before he died. When he was in Australia he wrote a good deal, among other things a choral drama, "Prometheus, the Fire-Bringer," which was actually composed out in the bush, and lost, and written all over again,

still in the bush. The first edition of this poem is styled "by Richard *Henry* Horne," and the second, which followed soon after, "by Richard *Hengist* Horne," showing the period at which he adopted the more barbaric name. I have glanced through a mass of Horne's manuscript, which I possess (I believe that Mr. Buxton Forman possesses a great deal more), to see whether I can find anything unpublished which is good enough to offer to the readers of this REVIEW. The following impromptu is at least brief; it was composed when the poet was in his seventy-eighth year:

"THE SPRING-TIDE OF THE BARDS.

" Ah, where is the Spring-tide of Poets of old,  
 When Chaucer lov'd April and all her sweet showers,  
 When Spenser's knights felt not their armor strike cold,  
 Tho' lost in wet forests or dreaming in bowers ?  
 'Tis a far other planet to us in this season,  
 And Nature must own we complain with some reason !

" For north winds, and east winds, and yellow-fac'd fogs,  
 And thunders and lightnings that scare buds and shoots,  
 May cheer the hoarse chorus of cold-blooded frogs,  
 But Man craves life's future, and fears for its fruits.  
 Then come again, Spring, like the dear songs of old,  
 Where the crocus smiled daily in sunlight and gold."

Horne's cheerfulness was a very pleasant feature in his character. Life had treated him very badly, love had missed him, fame had come down and crowned him, and then had rudely snatched the laurel away. If ever a man might have been excused for sourness, it was Horne. But he was a gallant little old man, and if it was impossible not to smile at him, it was still less possible not to recognize his courage and his spirit. Curiously enough, Elizabeth Barrett, who carried on so close a correspondence with Horne in her unmarried days, but who, warned by Miss Mitford, never would allow him to call upon her in person, had an accurate instinct of his merits and his weaknesses, and all the casual remarks about Horne, which she makes in the course of her letters to Robert Browning, strike one who knew Horne well in later years as singularly exact and perspicuous. His edition of her letters to him, published about twenty years ago in two volumes, is becoming a rare book, and contains many things of remarkable interest and importance.

It was from 1876 to 1879 that we saw him most frequently. He was living at this time in two rooms in Northumberland Street, Regent's Park, in very great poverty, which he bore with the gayest



and most gallant *insouciance*. An attempt was made—indeed, several attempts were made—to secure for him a little pension from the Civil List, and these were supported by Carlyle and Browning, Tennyson and Swinburne, to name no smaller fry. But all in vain; for some reason, absolutely inscrutable to me, these efforts were of no avail. It was darkly said that Mr. Gladstone would never, never yield; and he never did. When Lord Beaconsfield came into office, he granted the poor little old man £50 a year, but even then he had not too much food to eat nor clothes to keep him warm. Still he went bravely on, shaking his white ringlets and consoling himself with his guitar. He was fond of mystery, which is a great consoler. For economy's sake, he used to write on post-cards, but always with a great deal of care, so that the postman should be none the wiser. I have such a post-card before me now; it is an answer to a proposal of mine that he should come in and take dinner with us:

"Nov. 29, 1877.

"The Sharpshooter's friendly shot just received. By adroitly porting my helm, and hauling out my flying-jib, I shall, by 7 o'clock this evening, be able to get the weather-gauge of the Cape I was bound for, and run into your Terrace. Thine,  
REFERER."

Nothing, surely, could be more discreet than that.

To the very last he was anxious to regain his old place as a man of letters, and his persistency was really quite pathetic. One did not know what to do with his suggestions. I appeal to any one acquainted with the business of literature whether anything can be more trying than to receive this sort of communication:

"Don't you think curiosity might be aroused if you could induce the editor of the ——— to print something of this kind: 'We understand that a leading periodical will shortly contain a Dramatic Scene by the Author of 'Orion,' entitled 'The Circle of the Regicides,' in which such interlocutors as Dr. Kobold, Prof. Franz Tollkopf, Hans Arbeitsdulder and Baron Dumm von Ehrsucht, will represent certain well-known characters. There will also be brought upon the scene the Apparitions of Brutus, Cromwell, the patriot Mazzini, and the philanthropist Robert Owen; together with a chorus of French and Russian revolutionists, with a trio and chorus of female Regicides.' On second thoughts, perhaps, better stop after 'Owen.'"

It was difficult to bring such suggestions as these within the range of practical literature.

Horne's physical strength was very extraordinary in old age. It was strangely incompatible with the appearance of the little man, with his ringletted locks and mincing ways. But he was past seventy before he ceased to challenge powerful young swim-

mers to feats of natation, and he very often beat them, carrying off from them cups and medals, to their deep disgust. He was nearly eighty when he filled us, one evening, with alarm by bending the drawing-room poker to an angle in striking it upon the strained muscles of his fore-arm. He was very vain of his physical accomplishments, and he used to declare that he was in training to be a centenarian. These are things that should never be said, they tempt the fates; so one day, just after poor Mr. Horne had been boasting, he was knocked down by a van in Lisson Grove, and, although he rallied in a wonderful way, he was never the same man again. Presently, on the 13th of March, 1884, he died at Margate, whither he had been removed to take the benefit of the sea-air. He was in his eighty-third year. It would be a great pity that a man so unique and so picturesque should be forgotten. As long as the world is interested in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Horne can never be entirely forgotten, but he deserves to be remembered for his own sake.

EDMUND GOSSE.